



## **Aidan Montessori School**

Washington, D.C.

Head of School

July 2023

### **School Motto:**

*Ancora Imparo—I am still learning*

Aidan Montessori School ([aidanschool.org](http://aidanschool.org)) seeks a new Head of School for July 2023. Established in 1961, Aidan is an independent, AMI Montessori school, serving 180 students, ages 18 months through Grade 6, in the beautiful Woodley Park neighborhood of Northwest Washington, D.C.

Aidan is one of the oldest AMI Montessori schools in the United States. In addition to its authentic commitment to Montessori education, faculty and families appreciate Aidan's welcoming and diverse community, with 53% of students and 50% of faculty/staff identifying as people of color. With strong enrollment and finances, a highly trained faculty, a well-functioning Board of Trustees, and a recently completed strategic plan, this is a great time to join Aidan as its Head of School.

Aidan seeks an educational leader who shares its commitments to Montessori education, including a deep respect for children as unique individuals, and to ensuring a welcoming, supportive community for all stakeholders. The successful candidate will be an individual who can lead and inspire a well-trained faculty, serve as an inspiring and compelling ambassador for Aidan, and who is comfortable and confident in nurturing, inspiring, and enhancing a diverse community.

### **Mission**

Aidan's mission is to create and sustain an optimum Montessori educational environment to enable all children to realize their richest potential for learning and to become independent, self-motivated and contributing members of the world community. This is best accomplished by:

- Providing a curriculum adhering to rigorous Montessori standards, informed by current thinking and research on child development and learning;
- Fostering a love of learning;
- Embracing a diverse student body in which students experience and learn to respect racial, ethnic, cultural, economic and other differences and to seek and identify common ground;
- Recognizing that personal growth involves responsibility toward others and toward the earth;
- Facilitating the involvement of parents, teachers, students and the larger community.

The **core values** at the heart of Aidan's community provide the best environment for students to develop skills in critical thinking, civic engagement and creative problem solving. These values include:

- Nurturing independence

- Inspiring empathetic leadership
- Cultivating a love of learning

### **The Program**

Aidan's educational program adheres to AMI Montessori practices. All of Aidan's lead teachers are AMI Montessori trained and certified. Candidates are encouraged to explore the school's website for greater detail about the program. There are nine Montessori classrooms in total at Aidan.

Aidan serves students starting at 18 months in the Toddler program. Aidan has two Toddler Communities each led by a Montessori trained teacher, supported by two assistants, serving approximately twelve children aged 18 to 36 months. Aidan offers both full-day and half-day programs for all Toddler children. Aidan began to offer a full-day Toddler program two years ago, and the majority of families opt for this choice.

There are four Primary communities each led by a Montessori-trained teacher and supported by an assistant. Students in Primary are aged 2.5 through 6 years old. The 2022-23 school year will be the 3<sup>rd</sup> year that all Primary students are full day, with a former half-day option eliminated.

Montessori Elementary students are divided into two communities: Lower Elementary for ages 6-9 and Upper Elementary for ages 9-12, which serves students through the equivalent of Grade 6. At Aidan there are two Lower Elementary classrooms, and one Upper Elementary classroom. Lower and Upper Elementary class sizes range from 20-25 students. For the upcoming school year, the Upper Elementary program has the largest class size in recent years with 24 students. Each classroom has one Montessori trained teacher and an assistant teacher. Additionally, Art, Drama/Music, Foreign Language and Physical Education teachers, as well as two Learning Support specialists, and a Library/Media specialist serve all students. Both a Nurse and a School Counselor, full time positions, are available to students and serve as valued resources to faculty.

Specialist subjects are incorporated appropriately at different program levels. For example, Spanish is introduced in the Toddler program through song and play and more formal instruction begins in Primary and continues through Upper Elementary. Additionally, at the Toddler level a Spanish-fluent assistant teacher is in each classroom, and speaks to the children exclusively in Spanish. Chinese is introduced at the Primary level. While all students have Physical Education, Music, and Art, students in the Toddler and Primary programs experience these subjects through their classroom teachers and activities. Students have the opportunity to take individual music lessons, and Elementary students participate in the Elementary Spring Musical, a tradition established in 2005.

Aidan offers an *After School Program (ASP)* to students beginning at the Primary level. In addition to the general ASP that provides time for outdoor play, games, projects and snack, students have the *Discovery* program as an additional option. *Discovery* is Aidan's after school enrichment program. Offerings include classes in the arts, athletics, technology and language and are taught by Aidan staff and some outside teachers.

Aidan offers a summer program—*Aidan Explorers*—for students at the Primary and Elementary levels; while enrollment is primarily Aidan students, it is open to non-Aidan students, and some are enrolled in the Summer 2022 program.

### **The Campus**

Aidan moved to its current home, a former Catholic school, in 1995, and owns its 17,000 square foot building. The building provides light-filled classrooms and some office space. The school leases additional space nearby, the Annex, which provides offices for the advancement, business, communications, and diversity professionals.

The six-level school building – four classroom/office levels and two mechanical levels – is well cared for. Recent building investments include a new state-of-the-art HVAC system equipped with a Dedicated Outdoor Air System (DOAS) that constantly cycles outside air through the building, new windows, elevator, fire control, and security system. Aidan uses every foot of usable space, carving out small offices from former storage closets and setting up the library creatively in a corridor. There is no gymnasium or multipurpose common space.

The school's lot does not enable the building to be expanded, and outdoor space is limited. There is a twelve-car parking lot in the alley directly behind the school. The front of the school has a small, elevated garden area to the right of the main entrance (big enough for a small meeting/lunch table and some plantings but not enough to be considered recreational.) To the left of the entrance, at street level, is a walled-in playground. Approximately half of the surface is blacktop and there is a portable basketball hoop in that area. The other half is soft surface, covered with playground mulch, and has a wooden play structure.

The school's residential and urban neighborhood setting enables great access to the rest of the city through a nearby Metro station and provides a pretty area for a lunchtime walk. This setting has encouraged Aidan to be resourceful and to build relationships with others in the neighborhood. The close by Washington Marriott Wardman Park has a lawn that the school uses for outdoor play. The Marriott was recently sold and will be redeveloped into 900 apartments over the next five years. While the construction phase may present challenges, Aidan has an agreement with the developers that the lawn will remain green space available for Aidan's use, both during and after construction. The addition of the apartment development may also present the opportunity for new families to join the Aidan community. There is another park within walking distance that is used by some faculty and their students. Prior to Covid, the school utilized space in two nearby churches, which enabled Aidan to use a multipurpose space for play on rainy days and for occasions for larger gatherings.

### **Faculty and Staff**

For the 2022-23 school year, Aidan will employ 48 individuals (24 classroom staff; 9 specialty faculty; 15 administrative) and two outside contractors, a music instructor and a security officer. In addition to the Head of School, the administrative team includes two Assistant Heads of School, one for Faculty & Curriculum (who is AMI trained) and one for Operations. The team also includes Directors of Advancement, Auxiliary Programs, and Admissions & Enrollment Management, a Chief Finance Officer, Diversity Coordinator (a new role as of January 2022), Office Manager, Receptionist, and School Nurse. The two Assistant Head structure will be new to Aidan for the

2022-23 school year, replacing the previous Lower and Upper School Head model. There are additional staff members who support the various school and program operations.

As noted earlier, each classroom at Aidan is led by a Montessori trained teacher and assistant teachers support each classroom. Specialist faculty members are subject experts. Aidan employs two full time substitutes to ensure professional coverage and classroom support.

### **Enrollment**

Aidan has a very strong reputation and enjoys active interest from area families. An enrollment of approximately 180 students for the 2022-23 school year is anticipated, which reflects a strong rebuild after a significant dip during the Covid 2020-21 school year. The school has invested additional resources toward financial assistance in recent years, a commitment to supporting socio-economic diversity. Approximately 25% of students receive some type of financial assistance.

Like many Montessori schools, Aidan's enrollment is highest among its Primary program, with some families choosing to pursue other schools that begin in Kindergarten or other early elementary years. Focused efforts in recent years to ensure a very strong Elementary program and to educate parents on the value of the Montessori education through the culmination of the Upper Elementary program has strengthened student retention into and through the Elementary program.

Enrollment figures for the 2022-23 school year (as of late-July):

Toddlers: 24 + 6 new midyear admits = 30 in total

Primary: 85

Elementary: 62

### **Development**

Prior to the 2022-23 school year, Aidan had a Director of Advancement & Communications, and now has separated those two roles, hiring a Director of Advancement. The school's investment in a full time professional to oversee advancement should enable more focus on development opportunities. The 2021-2022 annual fund raised just over \$260K. Historically the school has had success in raising significant funds for strategic initiatives and building projects. The ongoing implementation of the strategic plan initiatives will offer stakeholders opportunities for additional support and investment. A new Head of School who has a successful track record supporting advancement activities will be a strong asset to the school's development program.

### **Governance, Associations, Budget**

The Aidan Montessori School Board of Trustees is comprised of fourteen individuals, most of whom are current parents. The Head of School serves as an ex officio member of the Board. The Board has a strong understanding and respect for governance best practices.

Aidan is a member of the Association Montessori Internationale (AMI), Association Montessori Internationale/USA, Montessori Administrators Association, National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS), the Association of Independent Maryland and D.C. Schools (AIMS), and the Association of Independent Schools of Greater Washington (AISGW).

Aidan is financially strong. The school's annual budget is \$5MM, and the school operates with a balanced budget. In 2013, in order to establish a credit rating and to access very favorable lending rates, the school assumed a mortgage. A second loan was taken out to cover some costs of the recent renovations and enhancements. Aidan's total debt as of June 30, 2022 is \$1,946,000, and unaudited net assets as of the same date are \$5,324,000.

### **Opportunities**

During the 2019-2020 school year Aidan undertook a strategic planning process that resulted in a plan entitled *Montessori for a Changing World*, which was drafted to set a pathway for the next decade. The process solicited the voices of many stakeholders; it identifies ten strategic initiatives across four domains that are fundamental to Aidan's maintenance of its Montessori strengths, and its evolution towards optimally meeting the needs of all children in the community. The domains are *Community, Environment, Diversity and Inclusivity, and Talent*. This plan and its ten strategic initiatives certainly capture many of the opportunities ahead and outline goals a new Head's leadership will be instrumental in achieving. Candidates are encouraged to review the plan shared on the school's website in detail. Additionally, it is important to note that this plan was shaped prior to the pandemic. The pandemic and some neighborhood changes highlighted Aidan's space vulnerabilities and needs, which are not captured within the strategic plan.

For over two decades Aidan looked for alternative space but set that initiative aside when drafting the strategic plan. There are numerous stakeholders who believe strongly that Aidan should look for an additional facility or a new home that would enable more indoor and outdoor space. With a re-development underway, Aidan's dependence on the outdoor space at the Marriot Wardman Park raises some concern. Additionally, as noted, indoor space is fully utilized, with the building unable to provide space for all school operations. Moreover, there are numerous stakeholders who believe that Aidan should expand its program to include a full Middle School, enabling students to attend Aidan through 8<sup>th</sup> Grade. A Middle School curriculum has been developed, but without additional space and broad community support, this expansion cannot be considered.

The new Head will have the opportunity to help enhance community as a whole. The challenges of the pandemic have understandably diminished many of the opportunities that build and steward community. Additionally, the school community has experienced a number of leadership transitions in recent years and some notable faculty turnover. A new Head who is attentive to ensuring a warm, welcoming environment for all community members and who has meaningful experience and a sincere appreciation for diverse communities will be instrumental in tone-setting as Aidan engages and re-engages families. Faculty will greatly appreciate a Head of School who sees him or herself as a teachers-Head, who knows how to well support and inspire faculty and staff and appreciate them as individuals. It will be important for the new Head to role model and encourage a strong professional culture and an environment that exudes throughout the school the Montessori expectations of grace and courtesy.

### **Leadership Needs**

Aidan Montessori School seeks an educational leader who will embrace and champion the school's mission and its diverse community. Aidan's next Head of School will be an educational professional who:

- Authentically connects with children and wholeheartedly appreciates the opportunities to engage with students, faculty, and families
- Is enthusiastically aligned with Aidan’s commitment to justice, equity, diversity and inclusivity and has the experience, knowledge, and heart to ensure that all members of the community feel supported and included
- Possesses well-developed, kind-hearted management and leadership skills, understanding how to solicit and listen well to numerous voices, build teams, and balance collaboration with decisiveness
- Appreciates the opportunities afforded by a small school community to know every child and their families by name, and be an active, visible and accessible presence in the day-to-day life of the school
- Is enthusiastic about the opportunities and strategic initiatives before the school and has the experience, skills, and appropriate ambition to lead others in achieving goals
- Has the knowledge and experience to serve as an educational leader and to recruit, inspire, mentor, and support staff and faculty, ideally possessing relevant classroom teaching experience
- Possesses superb communication and interpersonal skills
- Ideally presents a successful track record of strengthening a school’s advancement efforts, an enjoyment of engaging others in opportunities to invest in the school, and a commitment to effective financial stewardship
- Will embrace the role of ambassador for the school in the greater community, and
- Possesses unwavering integrity, an empathetic nature, and a sense of humor.

Heading a small school requires a leader who revels in and effectively balances the myriad tasks and responsibilities that are intrinsic to the position. The ideal next Head of School for Aidan Montessori School will be an educational leader who is aligned with the school’s AMI program, possesses high emotional intelligence, and a track-record that prepares him or her well for this great opportunity.

**For Consideration**

Please send electronically: Resume, Letter of Interest and Educational Philosophy or Personal Statement to:

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 617-332-3131

*All inquiries will be treated confidentially and review of candidate files will begin immediately.*